National Fire Plan

Hazardous Fuels Reduction

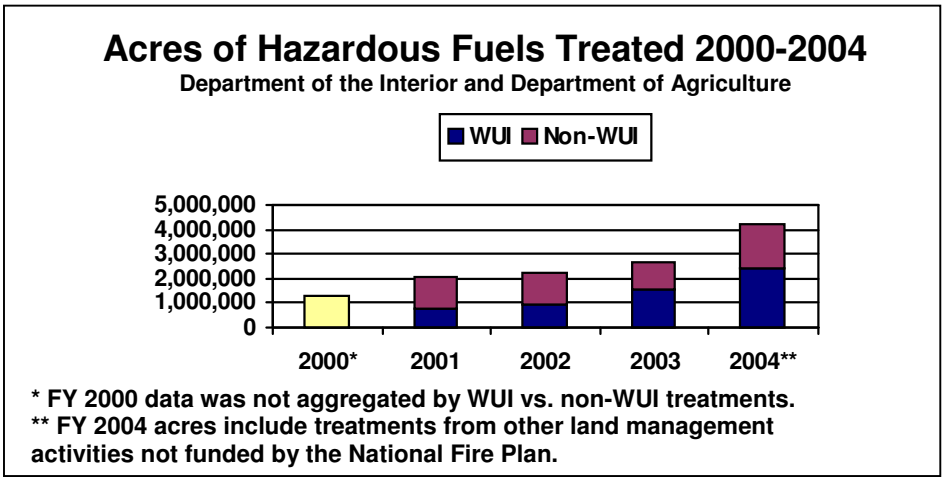
Fuels Reduction and Restoration Treatments

The hazardous fuels program reduces the impacts of wildland fires on communities and natural and cultural resources. Heavy fuels accumulation and altered vegetation composition and structure, in combination with sustained drought, are contributing to increased fire intensity, spread, and resistance to control through many parts of the United States. Fire occurrence records show an increase in the number of large wildland fires over the last two decades. The impacts of these fires are further compounded by the growth of communities adjacent to public lands, putting homes and other structures closer to areas where large wildland fires occur. In recent years, these changes have resulted in the need for wildland firefighters to spend more time and effort protecting structures.

In response to the risks posed by heavy fuel loads, the NFP established an expanded, intensive, long-term program of hazardous fuels reduction on federal and adjacent lands. This program emphasizes cooperation and collaboration among federal agencies, state, local, and tribal governments, and other stakeholders to achieve the fuels reduction goals and objectives of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan. Fuels reduction and restoration treatments are designed to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildland fire to people, communities, and natural resources.

Fuels treatments accomplish these goals by removing or modifying wildland fuels to reduce the potential for severe wildland fire behavior, lessen post-fire damage, limit the spread and proliferation of invasive species and diseases, and restore and maintain healthy, diverse ecosystems. Treatments are accomplished using prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, herbicides, grazing, or combinations of these and other methods.

During FY 2004, the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior treated a record 4.2 million acres of hazardous fuels on federal and adjacent lands. Of the total acres treated, 2.4 million were in wildland/urban interface areas. An additional 120,000 acres of wildland fuels were treated on federal lands through wildland fire use (WFU). Wildland fire use is the management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives including ecosystem maintenance and restoration.



Planning for Fuels Treatments

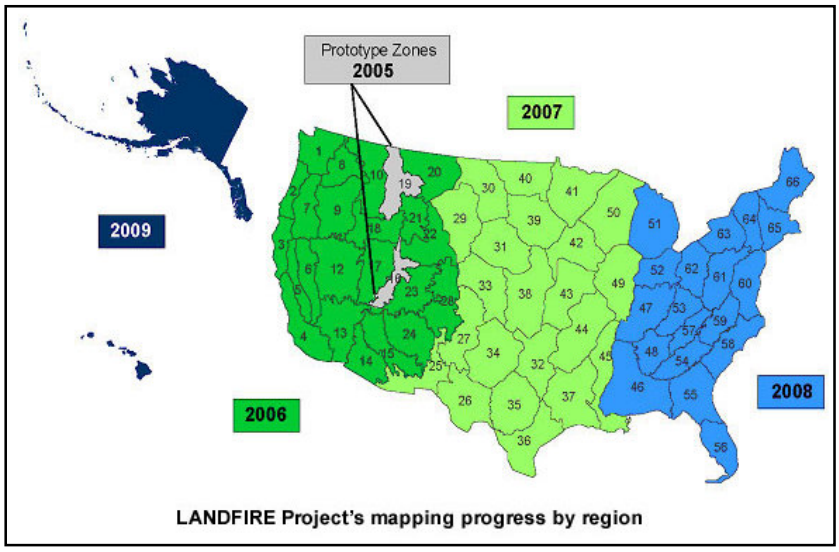
Project planning continues to be an important aspect of the program of work to prepare for fuels treatments in FY 2005 and into the future. Treatments must address high-priority needs, include local citizen-driven solutions, and be completed in a manner consistent with land use plans and environmental goals. With an emphasis on wildland/urban interface treatments, planning and consultation for fuels reduction projects involve more cooperators and a higher level of complexity than in the past.

In 2004, both Interior and Agriculture issued direction on priorities for planning fuels treatment projects in future years. Although this is not a comprehensive list, some key priorities include:

- All projects must result from a collaborative process.
- Funding will be targeted to the WUI and municipal watersheds.
- Within the WUI, focus should be on:
    - Projects near WUI communities at greatest risk of fire
    - Communities that have completed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan or its equivalent
    - Communities with active partnership with volunteer efforts, in-kind services, and/or where partners are contributing funding
- For non-WUI areas, focus on Condition Class 2 and 3 in Fire Regimes I, II or III, and Condition Class 1 where landscape conditions could quickly deteriorate to Condition Class 2 or 3.

Another planning tool is **Fire Management Plans** (FMPs), strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires and implement non-fire fuels treatments based on an area's approved Land Management Plan or Resource Plan. An interagency template was adopted to improve FMP consistency across agency boundaries and to facilitate developing multi-agency and landscape-scale FMPs. Federal wildland fire management agencies were committed to updating or completing FMPs on all administrative units with burnable vegetation by the end of FY 2004. All but one National Forest and 86 percent of DOI units completed their FMPs by the end of FY 2004. The agencies will ensure FMPs are reviewed annually and updated as needed.

The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture also established the multi-agency **LANDFIRE** project to develop a comprehensive package of Geographic Information System (GIS)-based spatial data layers, models, and tools to support analyses for prioritization and planning of fuels treatments at the national and local levels. Two prototype areas are under way in central Utah and northeastern Montana, with nationwide implementation planned from 2005-2009.



LANDFIRE Project's mapping progress by region

Forest Health Protection

In 2004 Forest Service funding of $24.7 million was allocated to provide treatment and technical assistance to manage and control native and non-native forest insects and diseases and for the evaluation of forest health after fires. Key expenditures and accomplishments include:

- $22 million allocated to implement insect and disease prevention, suppression, and restoration treatments on 315,204 acres (approximately $70 / acre). Major expenditures of this funding include:
    - $4.3 million for a southern pine beetle program focused on prevention and restoration
    - $6.1 million was allocated to a western bark beetle prevention and restoration program
- $1.7 million was allocated to treat a total of 54,000 acres for invasive weeds
- $600,000 was allocated for forest health monitoring evaluation projects. These 13 projects targeted NFP issues, including fire risks, invasive species, and fire effects to determine cause, extent, and severity.